

March 25, 2018

Re: "Her political dreams shattered after complaint against Seattle official. Decades later, it still haunts," an installment of "The Reckoning" series, published online March 23 and slated for print tomorrow, Monday, March 26.

Dear editors,

As a longtime editor at The Herald and The Eastside Journal, I bring to your attention several concerns about the story linked above, which centers on Rev. Dorinda Henry's tale of a sexual harassment complaint she filed against former City Councilwoman Sherry Harris more than 20 years ago.

I'm contacting you today on behalf of Sherry Harris in hopes of discussing these concerns with the aim of helping the Seattle Times present a more fair and accurate story.

Until the story appeared online, Sherry Harris was unaware that the old sexual harassment complaint was now being cast — untruthfully — as "sexual assault" and "abuse" by Henry and the Times. That's a disturbing leap for a reporter to make without any corroboration — yet the story provides none. The story quotes Henry saying she should be given the benefit of the doubt. This should apply to the accused, too.

Sherry Harris has been a private citizen for the past 21 years — she hasn't appeared in your pages or any local media since losing her race for a council seat in 1997. It has not gone unnoticed that Sherry Harris is the only individual in this latest round of stories who is named by her accuser, and also, for some inexplicable reason has "quotes" attributed to her second hand, via that same accuser, presented *in quotes*:

Instead, according to Henry, Harris said Henry would be fired and warned her: "I'll destroy you. You won't be able to do anything in this city," according to Henry.

The quote is false, and despite the multiple attributions, it's at best a paraphrase, isn't it? What makes this acceptable?

The story omits important context available from the Times' own archives. It presents the EEC investigation as being something other than fair and objective, based upon nothing other than Henry's account. The Times in 1995 did not take issue with the investigation, writing: "Carolyn Van Noy, the commission's executive director, informed the former employee yesterday that the commission found 'no factual basis for your complaint' and the case was closed."

The stories from that time also contained key context: That just before joining the city's unpaid internship program Henry was fired from her job working for a judge in Seattle Municipal Court, that she then filed a discrimination complaint against the judge, and that "her dismissal was upheld in administrative proceedings after an appeal." This is absent from the new story, though successive unsubstantiated complaints against her employers should raise some concern about her truthfulness. Curiously, the P-I story from the time contains this paragraph: "The female employee, who was fired in January, said yesterday she did not want to comment on the matter. When contacted a second time, the woman said the questions posed by the Post-Intelligencer bordered on harassment."

And there's this from 1995: "The event that clinched the aide's fate, Harris said, was when she (Henry) returned to Municipal Court and, representing herself as a Harris aide,

threatened an investigation into the court's hiring practices. That pronouncement caused a quick and angry reaction from the then-presiding judge, Nicole MacInnes, who asked Harris whether she was aware of her aide's employment history, Harris recalled."

Also, Henry was not a "close assistant" as reported in the story. She was a part-time intern on a job that was meant to end quickly.

We'd like to discuss these points with you in order to help you get the story right. Times readers and the greater Seattle area expect a lot from its shrinking community of professional journalists. As it stands, objective readers could reasonably conclude the Times decided to view this story through a particular lens, then carelessly framed it in a certain way to fit into the overarching narrative of a special project.

In addition, Sherry Harris offers this statement to be considered for inclusion into the story as her official response to the Times' demands for comment.

"I'm aware of and fully support the recent, national attention on workplace sexual harassment. Workplace harassment is particularly damaging to its victims and workplace reforms are necessary, for the good of all. And, for the good of all, complaints should be taken seriously and cases built using careful research and objectivity. Ms. Henry was not a victim of harassment during the brief time she worked in my office. I welcome a review of the EEC investigation file, notes and conclusions."

I look forward to hearing from you.

Robert Frank, for Sherry Harris

Robert Frank
Director of Northwest Operations